



*Acute sinusitis*

# Sinus Infection

## **SURPRISING FACTS:**

Most people who see a doctor for sinus symptoms do not have a sinus infection. Thick yellow or green mucus is normal as your body fights a virus—it does not mean you need an antibiotic.

## **WHAT TO DO:**

- Drink more water. Sip hot liquids.
- Use a humidifier and breathe moist air, as in a hot shower.
- Gently squirt salt water into the nose with a bulb syringe or ask an herbalist about a “neti pot.”
- Take acetaminophen or ibuprofen to relieve pain. Read the label for a child’s dose.
- Put moist, warm towels on the face.
- Try a decongestant for 2–3 days.

## **CALL YOUR DOCTOR IF:**

- You have a fever and sinus pain when you lean forward.
- Symptoms do not improve after 10–14 days.

## **A sinus infection involves a build up of mucus in the sinuses.**

There are several small chambers behind your cheeks and eyebrows, called sinuses. Most sinus infections start after a cold. Your body fights the cold virus by making mucus which helps wash the virus out of your nose and sinuses. The lining of the sinuses swells and the mucus is partly blocked. This is called sinusitis.

**There are different kinds of sinusitis.** Cold viruses are the most common cause. Smoking, allergies, using nasal sprays too much, swimming, even changes in air pressure, can lead to sinusitis. When mucus is blocked in a sinus passage, sometimes bacteria grow. Bacterial infections can cause sinus pressure, pain around the eyes when you lean forward, and fever. This is called acute bacterial sinusitis. A cold that starts to get better then gets worse may be a sign of acute bacterial sinusitis. Your health care provider may treat this kind of infection with an antibiotic. Antibiotics are used to kill bacteria.

**Antibiotics do not work on all sinus problems.** Many cases of sinusitis will get better on their own by using home remedies. Antibiotics don’t kill viruses, so they won’t make a cold go away any faster. Antibiotics often don’t help people who have ongoing or chronic sinusitis. Talk with your health care provider about whether you need an antibiotic. Taking antibiotics when they are not needed may harm you by creating stronger germs. It is best to take antibiotics only when needed. If your provider gives you antibiotics, always finish the entire prescription—the last few pills kill the toughest germs.

**The best ways to prevent infections are to wash your hands and to stop smoking.** Viruses are spread when you touch your hands to your mouth, nose and eyes. Washing your hands often with soap and warm water will help keep viruses from entering your body. When blowing your nose, blow gently. If you stop smoking you can prevent many lung, nose, ear and sinus problems. People who smoke are much more likely to get colds and sinusitis.



DOH 130-042 March 2009

For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127 (TDD/TTY 1-800-833-6388).

Developed in collaboration with:  
Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department / Illustration © 2001

Sources: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,  
American Academy of Family Physicians, and Healthwise



**Dear Colleague,**

The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) provides print-ready files (PDFs) of health education materials. To ensure that the original quality of the piece is maintained, please read and follow the instructions below and the specifications included for professional printing.

- **Use the latest version.** DOH materials are developed using the most current information available, are checked for clinical accuracy, and are field tested with the intended audience to ensure they are clear and readable. DOH programs make periodic revisions to educational materials, so please check this web site to be sure you have the latest version. DOH assumes no responsibility for the use of this material or for any errors or omissions.
- **Do not alter.** We are providing this artwork with the understanding that it will be printed without alterations and copies will be free to the public. Do not edit the text or use illustrations or photographs for other purposes without first contacting us. Please do not alter or remove the DOH logo, publication number or revision date. If you want to use a part of this publication for other purposes, contact the Office of Health Promotion first.
- **For quality reproduction:** Low resolution PDF files are intended for black and white or color desktop printers. They work best if you are making only one or two copies. High resolution PDF files are intended for reproducing large quantities and are set up for use by professional offset print shops. The high resolution files also include detailed printing specifications. Please match them as closely as possible and insist on the best possible quality for all reproductions.

If you have questions, contact:  
Office of Health Promotion  
P.O. Box 47833 Olympia, WA 98504-7833  
(360) 236-3736

**Sincerely,**  
**Health Education Resource Exchange Web Team**